

**IN THE CLAIMS:**

Please amend claims 1, 6 and 10 as follows.

1. (Currently Amended) A network device configured to prevent data misalignment of a data packet containing extra header bytes, the network device comprising:

an ingress module having an input interface to receive a data packet comprising a plurality of cells, wherein a header cell of the data packet is one of the plurality of cells of the data packet, wherein the header cell of the plurality of cells comprises a header and packet data information and wherein the header cell includes the header in its entirety for the data packet;

a header detector configured to detect the header cell of the data packet and remove the header from the header cell of the data packet;

a counter configured to determine whether the header cell of the data packet contains a multiple of a predetermined number of bytes after the header has been removed from the header cell;

an insertion module configured to insert null bytes into the header cell of the data packet to form a modified header cell of the data packet if the counter determines that the header cell of the data packet does not satisfy the multiple of the predetermined number of bytes in order to align all of the other cells of the packet; and

an extraction module configured to remove the null bytes from the modified header cell of the data packet as a modified cell of the data packet exits the network device.

2. (Previously Presented) The network device as recited in claim 1 wherein the network device comprises an aggregator that interfaces with an Ethernet and a System Packet Interface Level 4 communication system.

3. (Previously Presented) The network device as recited in claim 2 wherein the aggregator is configured to interface between a twelve 1-Gigabit ports and one 12 Gigabit/s System Packet Interface Level 4 uplink.

4. (Original) The network device as recited in claim 2 comprises a network switch.

5. (Original) The network device as recited in claim 1 further comprising:  
a medium access control (MAC) protocol module having a MAC address for transmitting the modified cell of the data packet; and  
a layer two switching module configured to build a table of forwarding rules upon which the MAC addresses exist and to instruct the extraction module to remove the null

bytes from the modified cell of the data packet as the modified cell of the data packet exits the network device.

6.(Currently Amended) A method of preventing data misalignment of a data packet containing extra header bytes, said method comprising:

receiving, at an input port of a network device, a data packet comprising a plurality of cells, wherein a header cell of the data packet is one of the plurality of cells, wherein the header cell of the plurality of cells comprises a header and packet data information and wherein the header cell includes the header in its entirety for the data packet;

detecting the header cell of the data packet;

removing the header from the header cell of the data packet;

determining whether the header cell of the data packet contains a multiple of a predetermined number of bytes after the header has been removed from the header cell;

inserting null bytes into the header cell of the data packet to form a modified header cell of the data packet if the counter determines that the header cell of the data packet does not satisfy the multiple of the predetermined number of bytes in order to align all of the other cells of the packet;

forwarding the modified header cell of the data packet to an output port; and

removing the null bytes from the header cell of the data packet as a modified cell of the data packet exits the network device.

7. (Previously Presented) The method as recited in claim 6, further comprising the step:

interfacing with an Ethernet and a System Packet Interface Level 4 communication system.

8. (Previously Presented) The method as recited in claim 7 wherein the interfacing occurs between a twelve 1-Gigabit ports and one 12-Gigabit/s System Packet Interface Level 4 uplink.

9. (Original) The method as recited in claim 6 further comprising the steps of:  
providing a medium access control (MAC) protocol module having a MAC address for transmitting the modified cell of the data packet; and

providing a layer two switching module configured to build a table of forwarding rules upon which the MAC addresses exist and to instruct the extraction module to remove the null bytes from the modified cell of the data packet as the modified cell of the data packet exits the network device.

10. (Currently Amended) A network device configured to prevent data misalignment of a data packet containing extra header bytes, the network device comprising:

receiving means for receiving, at an input port of the network device, a data packet comprising a plurality of cells, wherein a header cell of the data packet is one of the plurality of cells of the data packet, wherein the header cell of the plurality of cells comprises a header and packet data information, and wherein the header cell includes the header in its entirety for the data packet;

detecting means for detecting the header cell of the data packet;

header removing means for removing the header from the header cell of the data packet;

determining means for determining whether the header cell of the data packet contains a multiple of a predetermined number of bytes after the header has been removed from the header cell;

inserting means for inserting null bytes into the header cell of the packet to form a modified header cell of the data packet if the counter determines that the header cell of the data packet does not satisfy the multiple of the predetermined number of bytes in order to align all of the other cells of the packet;

forwarding means for forwarding the modified header cell of the data packet to an output port; and

null byte removing means for removing the null bytes from the modified header cell of the data packet as a modified cell of the data packet exits the network device.

11. (Previously Presented) The method as recited in claim 10, further comprising the step:

interfacing with an Ethernet and a System Packet Interface Level 4 communication system.

12. (Previously Presented) The method as recited in claim 11 wherein the interfacing occurs between a twelve 1-Gigabit ports and one 12-Gigabit/s System Packet Interface Level 4 uplink.

13. (Original) The method as recited in claim 10 further comprising the steps of:

providing a medium access control (MAC) protocol module having a MAC address for transmitting the modified cell of the data packet; and

providing a layer two switching module configured to build a table of forwarding rules upon which the MAC addresses exist and to instruct the extraction module to remove the null bytes from the modified cell of the data packet as the modified cell of the data packet exits the network device.